Peculiarities of Jain Mahārāṣṭrī Literature*
(A Brief Chronological and Subject wise Survey with Critical Remarks)

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Introduction: Jainology or Jain studies is a wholesome branch of knowledge in the perspective of Indian Culture. The edifice of Jain Tradition is based on four pillars, viz. 1) History or Antiquity, 2) Philosophy and Logic, 3) Literature and 4) Art and Sculpture. In the early years of my career, I entered Jainism through the gateways of Prakrit languages. Therefore, when I selected “Spectrum of Jainism in Maharashtra”, my attention was immediately drawn towards Jain Mahārāṣṭrī literature. In this paper, I will try to draw a brief sketch of Jain Mahārāṣṭrī literature with its highlights.

The variety of languages used by Jainas is stunning. No other religion in India had carried out its literary activities in various Prakrit dialects than Jainas. The ancient canonical texts of Śvetambaras are written in Ardhamāgadhī and that of Digambaras in Jain Śauraseni. Vācaka Umāsvatī introduced Sanskrit in Jain literature by writing Tattvārthsūtra in Śūtra style (4th Cen. A.D.). Many Śve. and Dig. Ācāryas continued their writing in Skt., the language of classes, up to 15th Cen. A.D.. Ācārya Bhadrabāhu (IIInd) started commentarial work on Ardhamāgadhī canons in Jain Mahārāṣṭrī in the 3rd Cen.A.D.by writing his Nijjuttis. All Śve. Ācāryas perferred J.M. for their literary activities in Prkt. up to 15th Cen. A.D.. In the meantime the religious and the philosophical teachings were written down in manuals in verse by scholars like Kundakunda, Vattakera and

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Yativrṣabhā and others up to the 12th Century. All these writings are included in the scope of Jain Śauraseni. The language found in all these books is fairly uniform but differs considerably from the Jain Mahārāṣṭri. Though Dig. continued their writings in JŚ, number of treatises is declining. Variety of subjects and literary forms is comparatively much less than that of JM. When Apabhramśa dialects took literary form, Dig. writers started their writings in Apa. Though the first Apa. epic of Svayambhu was written in 8th - 9th Century A.D., Digambara Ācāryas were in their full form between 10th up to 15th centuries. Their language is fairly uniform and constitutes the bulk of Apa. literature mostly dedicated to Carītas. The most striking feature of the Apa. literature is the fact that the whole of it is written in verses and there hardly exists any prose in it. The Apa. works written by non-Jain writers are scanty. Chronologically last part of Apa. is practically the beginning of New Indo Aryan language.

The facts which we get through this brief language-sketch of Jain literature, gives rise to ample curiosities about the Peculiarities of JM. literature.

Mahārāṣṭri and Jain Mahārāṣṭri

In Bharata’s Nātyaśastra, (2nd-3rd Cen. B.C.) Bhāṣās and Vibhaṣās are mentioned. Mahārāṣṭri is not enumerated in it. Some Scholars try to prove that Dākṣinātyā of Bharata is Mahārāṣṭri. Others did not agree with it. In Āṇḍa’s Prākritalakṣana (3rd-4th Cen. A.D.) Vararuci’s Prākritaparakāśa (6th Cen. A.D.) and in Siddhahemavāyākarana (12th Cen.A.D.) Mahārāṣṭri is treated in the beginning as Sāmānya Prākrita or Aṛṣa Prākrita. From the date of Daṇḍin (6th Cen A.D.) onwards it is named Mahārāṣṭri and is thought to be the best Prakrit in which famous epics were composed. (Daṇḍin-Kāvyāsdarśa 1.35). He says that the language originated in Mahārāṣṭra is Mahārāṣṭri.

Dr. Hornle points out that ‘Mahārāṣṭra includes Rajputana and Madhyadesa at that time. If we observe the proficiency of the Jain writers over this language, It is quite obvious that this
Mahā-rāṣṭra (big region) includes, today's geographical Mahārāṣṭra, lower part of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and also upper part of Karnataka. At least we can assume that the people residing in this bigger central part of India were able to understand the Mahārāṣṭri used by Jain Ācāryas.

It is observed by the eminent scholars like Jacobi, Pischel and Konow that in classical Skt. dramas, the Prakrit used in prose passages by ladies and lower characters is Śauraseni. We can say that Mahārāṣṭri used by non-Jain authors in Skt. dramas, Epics and Anthologies like Gahaśattasai was quite favorable for poetical compositions. Jain Ācāryas used it for both, i.e. poetry as well as prose. The scholars like Jacobi and Pischel named it as Jain Mahārāṣṭri. The name become very popular and accepted by late Dr. A.M. Ghatg in Prakrit-English comprehensive dictionary. Śvetāmbara writers started their J.M. writings in 3rd Century A.D. and continued up to 15th century A.D. In the early centuries of Charismatic Era, two prominent languages were in vogue viz. Śauraseni and Mahārāṣṭri. During this period, the differences between Śve. and Dig. were quite clear. Since Dig. had already started their philosophical writings in Śauraseni, naturally Śve. writers chose Mahārāṣṭri for their post canonical writings. A new literary style was developed which was suitable for their philosophical, doctrinal, didactic and conductual writings.

Close association of Jain Ācāryas with Mahārāṣṭra:

Due to various reasons like severe famines, political unrest and foreign invasions, the religious activities of Jain Samgha were naturally shifted towards Madhya-deśa and Southern lands.

From the legendary histories of Jainas (viz. Vividhatirthakalpa, Prabandhakośa, Prabhavakacarita etc.) it is known that many influential Śve. Ācāryas were in close contact with Mahārāṣṭra.

It is known from the history of Ancient India that after the death of Aśoka, Andhrabhṛtya Sātavāhana Kings ruled over
Mahārāṣṭra from 3rd Century B.C. up to 3rd Century A.D.. In Prabandhakośa, Rājaśekhara mentions,

सातवाहनोनि क्रमेण दक्षिणपथ्यनृणं विधाय तापीतीर्ष्यत्वं चोत्रराप्यं
साधयत्वा स्वकौशस्वत्तां प्रावीशुतल् (Prabandhakośa. pp.66-74)

The 17th king of this dynasty was Hāla Sātavāhana, who become famous for his anthology viz. Gahāsattasat. Guṇādghya who is famous for his paiśāci narrative Vaḍḍakahā, is said to be an honoured poet in the assembly of Sātavāhana. Through all these legendary histories it is evident that all the Sātavāhanas were interested in Prakrits and especially in Mahārāṣṭri. Pratiṣṭāna (or Paithana) and Nasikya were the capital cities of Sātavāhanas.

According to Prabandhakośa, Niryuktikāra Bhadrabāhu and Varāhamihira were two brahmin brothers, residents of Pratiṣṭāna. Various legendary stories of both are mentioned in this Prabandha. The famous ‘Uvasagahara Stotra’ was composed by Bhadrabāhu in his stay at Pratiṣṭāna. After the time-lapse of 800 years, it was necessary to write explanatory notes on Ardhamāgadhi canons. It was very much logical to write it in Prakrit, in continuation with the spirit of Lord Mahāvira. Bhadrabāhu wrote ten Niryuktis in Prakrit Gathā form. Since he was the resident of Pratiṣṭāna he chose Mahārāṣṭri language which was naturally influenced by Ardhamāgadhi. Further Śve. Ācāryas wrote their Bhaṣya and Cūrṇis following the tradition laid down by Bhadrabāhu IInd.

The famous Jain Ācārya Kālaka (4th Cen A.D.) came to Pratiṣṭāna in the last lap of his wanderings. He had discussions with Sātavāhana about the date of Paryuṣana. After this incidence, Kālaka stayed at Pratiṣṭāna until his death. Due to this association, there are at least three Kālakācārya-kathānakas written in JM. which were critically edited by Sten Konow.

Pādaliptācārya is a frequently quoted Śve. Ācārya of 5th Century. It is noted in Prabandhakośa that the arrived at Pratiṣṭāna and created a Campūkāvya named Taraṅgalolā. (prasād-kos pp.
This beautiful literary work (which is not available now) inspired many poets to write their poetries in JM.

The famous logician Siddhasena Divākara, his Guru Vṛddhavādi and Śantisūri, the first commentator of Uttarādhayana were also closely connected with Pratiṣṭāna and Nāsikya during their wanderings.

This legendary and historical data is sufficient to throw light on the background of the bulk of Jain Mahārāṣṭrī literature.

**Special Features of JM. Literature:**

Niryuktis on 10 Ardhamāgadhi canons, some of the Prakirṇakas, two Cūlikāsūtras, three Bhāṣyas along with Viṣeṣāvaśyaka and Cūnis of Jinadasaṇa - the language of all these works is generally known as Ārṣa Prakṛta because it is influenced by Ardhamāgadhi. Though Mahārāṣṭrī elements are prominent, still we find some linguistic characteristics of Māgadhi and Śauraseni. Vimalśūri's Paumacariyam (4th Cen A.D.) is also included in this category. This narrative poetry was written excluding the impossible and illogical elements of Vālmiki-Rāmāyana. This first Jain Rāmāyana inspire many writers to present Rāmāyaṇakathā in Jain manner. The poetic justice given to the female characters (viz. Sitā, Aṇjanā, Kaikeyi and Mandodari) is unique in itself.

Vasudevahinī jointly written by Samghadasa and Dharmasena in 5th Cen. A.D. is also noted as a grant narrative presented in Ārṣa Prakṛta or old Jain Mahārāṣṭrī. The part of the book viz. Madhyama Khaṇḍa shows the linguistic characteristics of Śauraseni. In the history of Indian Literature, Vasudevahinī acquired very esteemed position due to its curious connection with Vaḍḍakahā of Guaṇadhaya.

In the 6th or 7th Century, the great Śve. logician Siddhasena wrote Sanmatitarka in JM. in which he discussed the Nayas, in a comprehensive manner on the view of Anekāntavāda. Sanmati is one of the very few JM. works on logic.
Haribhadra is the most celebrated, honoured and versatile author in the 8th century.

Throughout his life he wandered in Rājasthāna and Gujarat and never visited Mahārāṣṭra. It seems that with a sound background of Skt. he acquired the skills in JM. and produced (i) a huge prose narrative like Samaraiccakahā, (ii) a unique satirical work like Dhuttakkahāna which inspired Skt. Dharamaparikṣā and Abhramīśa Dhammaparikkha in the later period, (iii) first JM. book dedicated to Yoga in Jain manner (viz. Yogasayaya), (v) other treatises related to Karma theory, Monastic conduct, Layman’s conduct, Didactic and Karana-nuyoga. Haribhadra included a lot of folk stories, examples, fables and traditional religious stories in his commentaries on Āvassaya and Dasaveyāliya. Though the explanations of Sūtras are given in Skt., he had purposely used JM. for this stories.

Conclusively we can say that the JM. used by Haribhadra represents it’s classical form. His language comes nearest to pure Mahārāṣṭri. His vocabulary consists of a lot of old Gujrati deśi words, influence of Skt. in the use of evi forms, compounds ending in bhūya (bhūta) and ample literary words. This classical form reaches its height in Kuvvalayamālā of Uddyotanasūtri. This monumental Campukāvyā, full of rich cultural data is written in the last lap of the 8th Century.

When we cast a glance to the 9th Century - literary, it is seem that the variety of subjects in remarkable. JM. works in this century are concerned to Philosophy, Anthology, Didactic, Karman, Hymns and Legendary histories. Śilāṅka started the tradition of writing Caritas in JM. along with his commentaries on Ācāraṅga and Sutratāṅga. Bappabhaṭṭi wrote his anthology Tārayāna, who was in the close contact with Vākpatirāja (Bappairāya) the poet of famous Mahārāṣṭri work Gaṅdvahāho.

Virabhadra, belonging the 10th century, wrote his Prakīrṇakas viz. Ārāhaṇapāḍāyā, Āurapaccakkhaṇa, Causaraṇa and Bhattapariṇṇa in Ārṣa Prakrit form. The language and
presentation of the subjects were so revered among the Śvetāmbaras that the Prakirṇakas were treated as a part of canonical literature. Devsana’s works on logic, Devendrasūri’s Kalakācārya Kathānaka, Dhanapāla’s celebrated lexicon of Prakrit words and Nanditāḍhya’s work on metrics (viz. Gāhālakkhana) are the remarkable treatises of this century. Pradyumna’s off-beat stories are also noteworthy which are included in Mulasuddhipagaṇaṇa. Carita tradition is continued in this century.

In the 11th Century, we find nine Caritas written in J.M. which are published up till now. Three of them are written by Devendra alias Nemicandra, famous author of Sukhabodha, a comm. on Uttarāḍhyaṇa. Dhaneśvara’s Surasundarīcāriya gives sole importance to a woman character which is unique and has given rise to the tradition of women-centered Caritas. Many Kathākoṣas are written in which Devendra’s Akkhanamāṇikos, Guṇacakendra’s Kāhārayaṇakos and Jīneśvara’s Kathākoṣa-prakaraṇa are most important. Mahēśvara’s Nānapaṇacamikāhā started the tradition of Vratakathas. Prakaraṇas and Kulakas are the new literary forms developed in this century.

12th Century seems to be very crucial in the history of J.M. literature. Tendency of writing in JŚ. is almost stopped. The number of Skt. works of Śve. and Dig. are rapidly increasing. J.M. Works are almost equal to that of Skt. works. Apabhramśa works in this century had been seen to be taken classical literary form. Digambara writers are writing Apa. works with full enthusiasm. Detailed grammar of Apa. is written by Hemacandra in his Siddhahemavyākaraṇa along with the examples of Apa. verses chosen from non-Jain background. The peak point of Jain logic is seen in Prameṇamīmāṁsā, a celebrated Skt. work of Kalikalāsarvajñā Hemacandra. He continued the tradition of J.M. writings by presenting his unique lexical works Deśināmālā and Kumārapālacarita. Maladhāri Hemacandra wrote the Tippanas on canons, Malaygiri’s huge commentarial work is the speciality
of this century. Municandra wrote five Kulakas and three Prakaraṇas. His Vanaspatisaptatikā is remarkable. Śricandra wrote in JM. and Skt. very fluently.

In the 13th Century, JM. literature is comparatively less than Skt. and Apabharamsa literature is steadily growing.

Thakkura Pheru, a treasurer of Allauddin Khilji wrote many scientific and technical works in 14th Century. His small treatises are extremely important in JM. literature. These treatises are dedicated to Numismatics, Metallurgy, Mathematics, Astrology, Gemmology and Architecture. Ratnaśekhara wrote on Ethics, Karaṇānuyoga, Caraṇānuyoga and Caritas. Jinaprabha’s Vidhimārgaprapā is an authentic work on rituals. Growing ritualistic tendencies in Jain religion are reflected in Jinaprabha’s other works also. Jayavallabha’s anthology called Vajjālagga and Nayacandra’s Prakrit drama - Saṭṭaka are two remarkable works of this century.

In the 15th Century, JM. works show declining tendency. Jinaharsa, Somacandra, Śubhavardhana, Sakalakirti and Cāritravardhana wrote in JM. but the variety of subjects and literary forms is not seen. Caritas and Kathākoṣas are ample in number but lack in originality and imitation prevail over creativity.

This is the brief sketch of JM. literature from 3rd Century A.D. up to 15th Century A.D..

CONCLUSION

Important Observations about JM. Literature:

* In no other Prakrit language than JM. such a huge literature is produced in India for such a long period (from 3rd Cen A.D. up to 15th Cen. A.D.)

* Since the Dig. had already chosen Śaurusaṇi for their literary activities, Śve. writers had naturally undertaken Mahārāṣṭrī.
* Mahārāṣṭri was understandable in the bigger middle region of India during this period.

* Skt. was the medium of higher education, so naturally Scientific and Technical works and Classical literature of non-Jain traditions is ample in quality and quantity. Lord Mahavira was very keen about his religions sermons through Prakrit medium. JM. played the role of Raṣṭrabhāṣā at that time. Now-a-days though the medium of higher education is English, still Hindi possesses a status of Raṣṭrabhāṣā, likewise side by side with the regional colloquial languages and Skt., JM. played an important role. Śve. writers continued JM. writings following the footsteps of Lord Mahavira.

* The earlier Śve. Jain Acāryas like Bhadrabāhu, Kalakacarya, Pādalipta etc. were closely associated with Mahārāṣṭra and specifically Pratiṣṭhāna. Nearly for six centuries Satavāhanas ruled over Mahārāṣṭra who were pro-prakrit by nature and liberal in religious matters.

* JM. had undergone three distinct stages during this long period of twelve centuries.

(i) Ist Stage : 3rd to 6th Century.

The various Niryuktis, Bhāṣyas, Āruṇis and the narrative works like Paumacariya, Vasudevahinḍī and others may be taken to represent the archaic form of JM.. It was influenced by Ardhamāgadhī.

(ii) IInd Stage : 7th to 10th Century.

In its classical form, as represented by Haribhadra, Uddyoṭanasūryi, Śīlānka and Dhanapāla, it shows influence of Skt. but still maintaining tendencies of colloquial languages in variety of forms and the use of Deśī words.

(iii) IIIrd Stage : 11th to 15th century.

The late form of JM. is best seen in the stories of Devendra
in Utt. Sukh, and the anthology called Vaijñalagga. Here we see a strong influence of the Apabhramśa dialects making it felt both in its phonology and grammar. This Apa. influence originates from the spoken languages of the authors.

After 15th Century we see that JM. is declining and Apa. is increasing. From the 16th and 17th Centuries, the history of our modern Indo-Aryan Languages Starts.

Though variety of subjects and literary forms is obviously seen in JM. literature, it is a fact that scientific and technical works as well as words on Logic are comparatively much less than in Skt. But the role played by JM. in providing rich Cultural, Social and Religious data is really very useful in understanding Indian culture in better manner. No other Prakrit language than JM. is capable in throwing light on the life of masses in India during this long period.

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